

NEWS • TICKER



By Ina El Kobbia, Germany

HORSES AND DREAMS 2008

Germany's outdoor riding season started off in spring with the International Riders' Festival Horses and Dreams in Hagen. This time the already 12th Horses and Dreams Festival carried the motto "Horses and Dreams meets America". More than 50.000 visitors enjoyed the special American spirit on the Kasselmann Yard. Participants from 20 nations in addition to 600 horses were enrolled

for this four day Festival. The German dressage squad with its top riders double World Champion and European Champion Isabell Werth along with the team World Champions Heike Kemmer, Nadine Capellmann and Hubertus Schmidt were eager to compete outdoor and to test their own as well as their horses' conditions after the long winter indoor season, particularly in view of the upcoming

summer Olympics. In the CDI*** Event, Isabell Werth and 'Satchmo' underlined their excellence and won both the Grand Prix as well as the Grand Prix Special, whereas Heike Kemmer won on her Hanoverian horse 'Bonaparte' the Grand Prix Kür. Additionally the special German Dressage Championships for Professionals in the highest class 'S' were won by the host's wife Bianca Kasselmann on her horse 'Forum 2'.

Jumping riders also had to take the challenge of an international three star competition, CSI***, with 15 efforts and a height of 1.50 m; around 17 nations enrolled for this event. Amongst the participating riders were also Karim El Zoghby from Egypt and Jordanian rider Ibrahim Bisharat; both presented themselves well with confident rides, but did not qualify for the end round of the Grand Prix. The happy winner of the Grand Prix of Hagen was Germany's renowned rider Otto Becker on 'Lunatic' followed by the Swiss female rider Christina Liebherr; the third place was to another renowned German rider Carsten-Otto Nagel on his stunning mare 'Corradina'.

During the Festival the host Ullrich Kasselmann and his visitors were pleasantly surprised by 205 motorcyclists on their Harley Davidsons, who contributed to the special American spirit of the Festival!



▲ Isabell Werth & Satchmo at Horses and Dreams 2008

HOW DANGEROUS IS EVENTING?

Eventing - a three phase competition that consists of dressage, a cross-country obstacle course and show jumping - has come again under scrutiny because at least 14 riders have died worldwide in competitions over just the past year and a half; which makes eventing an even more dangerous sport than the international motor sport car racing, Formula One! Since the tragic death of the outstanding Brazilian World Champion Ayrton Senna in 1994 in Imola, the motor sport has invested heavily in the safety of the drivers and their cars which led to the result that Formula One did not witness the death of any of its drivers for 13 years. In fact eventing began to learn from Formula One; experts from the motor sport for example gave advice on how to create better helmets that protect the rider against breaking his neck which is a fatal injury that frequently results from the fact that the rider falls from the horse and hits either the solid obstacle or ground, or a more frequent occurrence is that the horse falls on top of the rider. It is easily understood that it is the cross-country exercise with its solid fences that makes eventing inherently dangerous. Just before the 2006 World Equestrian Games the British team lost young eventing rider Sherelle Duke, Germany lost in 2007 two eventing riders in only one week and in early 2008, two top contenders for the U.S. Olympic team have been seriously injured during competitions. Back in 1999 eventing was headline news as the result of an unprecedented fifth death from a cross-country fall in Britain in a year. In the 1990's discussions arose on whether or not eventing should be kept in the Olympic programme.

However, eventing has remained an Olympic discipline from 1912 until today; the FEI even noted in its recent

report at the beginning of this year that the number of eventing competitions as well as the number of starters in this discipline, have increased over the years. It also has to be noted that efforts have been taken to make this sport safer for riders and horses such as the improvement of the riding equipment, i.e. helmet and vest. Furthermore, the course design has become increasingly more focused on the safety of the horse and rider, and the cross-country course itself has been shortened. The newest improvement in cross-country safety is the "frangible fence", which uses a pin to hold the log of an obstacle up. Should a horse hit the obstacle, the pin breaks and the obstacle falls to the ground. This technique helps to prevent the most dangerous situation on cross-country which is when the horse hits a solid fence between the forearm and chest, and somersaults over – sometimes falling on the rider. This type

of fall has caused the death of several riders, as well as horses. Nevertheless, given the recent death tolls and serious injuries of both riders and horses, it seems that the mentioned improvements are not enough. The FEI responded recently by announcing a rule change that would disqualify a rider if either the horse or rider fell at any time during the competition. Additionally the FEI focuses on the ongoing education of the riders and their associations as well as responsible organisers. It remains to be seen how eventing will develop in the future, hopefully riders, horses and spectators will be spared tragic scenes; to use the words of the thrice Olympic winner in eventing, Australian Andrew Hoy: "We have all known the feeling of jumping a fence in a manner that wasn't quite as we planned, but we don't expect to pay for it with our lives."



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A UNIQUE SPECTACLE CHIO AACHEN 2008



▲ Carsten-Otto Nagel and his stunning mare Corradina



▲ A Unique Spectacle, CHIO Aachen 2008

CHIO (Concours Hippique International Officiel) Aachen is the only tournament of this kind in Germany. According to the FEI regulation each country can only hold one CHIO tournament. CHIO Aachen has a long tradition; it was first opened in 1927 and is known today around the globe as the "Wimbledon of equestrian sport"! The best riders and horses of the world compete in Aachen in five different disciplines: jumping, dressage, four-in-hand driving, eventing and vaulting. Last year some 400.000 spectators visited the Event and 470 journalists were accredited for it. CHIO Aachen has four official sponsors: Mercedes Benz, Rolex, Warsteiner and the Dubai Equestrian Club. For the first time since its existence CHIO Aachen 2008 was held over two weekends, from the 27th of June until the 6th of July; furthermore this year's event was very special for another reason: riders and horses tried to give their best to star in their disciplines, as this year's CHIO Aachen meant for many athletes the last possibility to qualify for the Olympics!

The jumping competitions at CHIO are held in the main stadium, the biggest in the equestrian world. In Aachen riders and their horses have to be in top form to meet the numerous challenging

competitions over a period of ten days. The Nations' Cup in jumping is one of the highlights of the Event; each nation has to overcome two rounds with its team, which usually consists of four riders, whereby the best three out of four rides count. After the first round, Germany, the Netherlands, the U.S. and Great Britain were the hottest candidates for the title. In the second round Ludger Beerbaum on his 9 year old 'All Inclusive' brought the final result for Germany by his clear round and a two point penalty for exceedance of time; Germany won the Nation's Cup with a total score of 16 penalty points well ahead of the Netherlands with 20 scores. For Germany it was already the third win in a row. The best Dutch rider was Albert Zoer, who had two clear rounds. The third place went to the teams of the U.S. and Britain, both scored 21 points. The best rider in the U.S. team was Beezie Madden. Beezie also won the Prize of the Dubai Equestrian Club, Best of Champions, with the extra challenge of changing horses. Coming in second was German Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum followed by Jos Lansink, who took third place. CHIO Aachen always ends with the special highlight of the Grand Prix of

Aachen in jumping. Not many horses and riders can keep their concentration and condition on such a high level to meet after a ten day tournament the extra challenges of a jumping Grand Prix, but Dutch Albert Zoer on his 9 year old gelding 'Sam' did! They are the new champions of Aachen. The Dutch couple edged out Ludger Beerbaum and his also 9 year old 'All Inclusive' by four-hundredths of a second! The third place was to a most amiable couple: German Carsten-Otto Nagel and his outstanding mare 'Corradina'; it has been a joy to watch this couple over the days in Aachen. At the challenging Grand Prix they performed elegantly with clear rounds. After the first round Carsten-Otto was in tears, as he was so overwhelmed by his young mare and her devotion to her rider. The couple was a hot candidate for the Olympics, but the owners of 'Corradina' did not want the mare, that is only nine years old, to face the stress and strains of a long trip to the Olympics in China with additionally the extremely hot weather conditions there.

It has to be noted that Germany also won in Aachen the Nations' Cups in dressage, eventing and vaulting. Germany's best individual dressage rider was again Isabell Werth on 'Satchmo'; the couple won the Grand Prix Kür ahead of Dutch Adelinde Cornelissen. The overall best individual rider in eventing was German Frank Ostholt on his horse 'Air Jordan'.

Although this year's CHIO Aachen meant a lot of wins for Germany, German riders were keen to keep a low profile with regard to the upcoming Olympics. In an interview Ludger Beerbaum spoke for many when he commented: "What happens in seven weeks time, will have nothing to do with Aachen anymore..."



HONG KONG RIDING HIGH

About the Olympics...

It has not been easy in the past months for the Olympic officials in China. At first, during the traditional Olympic torch relay around the globe, China faced severe outside criticism for its tough response to riots and protests in Tibet, soon after, a massive earthquake hit the south-western part of China killing tens of thousands of people. Now, less than a month to go for the Olympics in August, things seem to be in order again. China stood up; the government led a massive relief effort for the devastated regions of the earthquake and earlier severe outside criticism softened. China wants to present the best Games ever and if China stands together, it seems that there is no hurdle that it cannot take.

Whereas the main venue of the Olympic Games as well as the opening ceremony on the 8th of August will be held in Beijing, the equestrian Olympic part will be held in Hong Kong, the glamorous business city with its stunning architecture and world famous skyscrapers.

Almost one year ago, in August 2007, the FEI President, HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, informed the international media at the European Jumping Championships in Mannheim, Germany, about the ongoing preparations for the Olympic Games with regard to the equestrian sport. The Princess who was at that time in her six months of pregnancy had just returned from a test event in Hong Kong. She informed the international audience that the test was a success:

"The Hong Kong Jockey Club is as you know a very professional organisation and in so many ways we are lucky to

be partnered with them. The main issue that had worried everybody was obviously the weather and the heat conditions. Probably for the first time in the FEI's history we had a situation where there was a marriage between the horse sport community and the racing community to find the best way and both ideal situation for horses to compete. I think we came up with wonderful sights. I thought it was an amazing achievement. I believe that the competitors were more than happy with the facilities; the facilities are wonderful. I think that the people of Hong Kong and the City really, really embrace the Event. I am sure that it will be a success."

Now a year later at this stage most of the Olympic teams are preparing their horses and themselves for the departure to Hong Kong. One of the first teams to leave for Hong Kong will be the German team.

Already on the 27th of May one of the world's top jumping riders, Irish Jessica Kuerten, announced in an official press release that she will not participate at the Olympics. Jessica decided together with horse owner Lady Georgina Forbes, to inform Robert Splaine that she gives up her place for Ireland at the Olympics. Jessica wants to give her horse 'Castle Forbes Libertina' a well deserved rest, as she says, and 14 year old 'Quibell' is a very nervous flight passenger, the long flight and the



The FEI President HRH Princess Haya at the press conference in Mannheim

Zara Philips, eventing star & granddaughter of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



weather conditions would be too much stress for the mare.

Another top rider announced recently her withdrawal from the Olympics: the World Champion and European Champion in eventing, Britain's Zara Philips, granddaughter of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The 26 year old was considered a strong contender for an Olympic medal. She was forced to withdraw after her horse, 'Toytown', was injured in training. "I am very disappointed not to have the opportunity to ride at the Olympic Games and feel that Toytown deserved his chance to go," Philips said in a statement. "However, with horses these things happen and we still have a very strong team. I wish them every success."

To compete at the Olympics is a dream for any athlete and an exciting and unique event for all sport enthusiasts. Sport has the capacity to unite people from around the globe; may the official theme slogan of the Beijing Olympics: "One World one Dream" come true! **HT**